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Military Chief Of PLO Seen as Arafat Opposite

Salah Khalaf, the 48-year-old, chain-smoking military chieftain of the Palestine Liberation Organization, is "a priest conducting his duties with intense identity with his religious beliefs, but without public acclaim, because it is enough for him to know that acts and accomplishments speak for themselves."

This is the conclusion of U.S. intelligence experts in a confidential psychological profile of the man whose mission is to withstand the Israeli attack on PLO power bases in Lebanon. Yasser Arafat is the PLO's well-publicized "front man," while Khalaf is the group's nuts-and-bolts military strategist.

The personality profile, obtained by my associate Indy Badhwar, provides a marked contrast to Khalaf's opposite number in the Israeli-PLO conflict, Gen. Rafael Eitan, the Israeli chief of staff. At first glance, Khalaf's credentials would seem to be no match for Eitan's gung-ho military background.

But Khalaf is considered by Western intelligence analysts as the best the PLO has to offer. And, like Israel's Eitan, he is considered willing

to operate in the shadow of Numero Uno. In Eitan's case, the leader he pays obeisance to is Menachem Begin; in Khalaf's case, it is Arafat.

"His style demands that he stay in the shadow of his leader," the profile says of Khalaf. "It is suspected he is less comfortable in the limelight than Arafat, and welcomes the number two spot for its privacy."

Unlike Eitan, however, Khalaf is regarded by Western intelligence analysts as far more effective than his boss in promoting the PLO cause. This, the confidential profile says, is because "his greater discipline has equipped him for contributing meaningful and precise views of the Palestinian movement, whereas Arafat might shoot from the hip."

Khalaf and Arafat have been buddies since their student days in Cairo. But while Arafat is an inveterate trimmer, always open to compromise to protect his political position, Khalaf is an able and willing decision-maker, the profile says.

Where Arafat "hesitates to do anything that will disturb his congeniality with others," Khalaf is blessed—or cursed—with "objectivity and rationality." Though he is as politically savvy as Arafat, the profile concludes that "his more private style makes it less obvious." There is no question of Khalaf's dedication to the Palestinian cause.

He is acutely conscious of his own political skills but applies them "carefully and deliberately," accord-

ing to the intelligence analysis. And though he is overworked and under constant strain, he seems to welcome this stress as self-ennobling.

One of Khalaf's stronger traits is that he is not wrapped into a narrow political ideology. "Khalaf is not ruthless, but cunning," the intelligence profile states. "He lacks the nihilistic philosophy and, therefore, has not the middle-class Baader-Meinhof behavior"—a reference to the West German rich-kid terrorists.

Just as the hard-charging Gen. Eitan seems to be the perfect sidekick for the strong-willed Begin, the able but self-effacing Khalaf seems to be the ideal cohort for the insecure showman, Arafat.